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ENTRANCE REQUIREMENTS AND "COLLEGE DOMINATION" AS SOURCES OF MOTIVATION IN HIGH-SCHOOL WORK¹

WILLIAM C. BAGLEY
The University of Illinois

I may confess at the outset to a very decided prejudice against what is ordinarily termed "college domination." That prejudice has been derived from a good many years of experience in the service of the lower schools. I am naturally jealous of the fruits of that experience. I paid the price of some sleepless nights and a good many long-drawn-out, bitter days for whatever practical knowledge I may possess of ways and means of meeting public-school problems. If there is anything that today rouses my ire, it is for someone who has not faced and solved similar situations to make light either of the difficulties that inhere in the actual concrete problems of the lower schools or the value of the experience that comes from facing and solving these problems.

I must hasten to add, however, that continued association with university men leads me more and more to conclude that I was once quite wrong in placing all or even a large majority of them in the class of critics and fault-finders. I do not say that the university communities are entirely devoid of such men. In

¹ Read at the General Conference of the Academies and High Schools in Relations with the University of Chicago, November 12, 1910.

fact, the attitude of Brahmanism is still all too frequently to be noticed, especially among the younger men, and I think that it is this attitude that public-school people are likely to notice. When this attitude influences—as it will inevitably influence—the discussions of college-entrance requirements, public-school men are likely to characterize it as college “domination” of secondary-school policies. The more experienced and influential college and university men, however, recognize the significance that must always attach to specialized adjustments in any field of human activity. I can think of no fairer attitude that a university man could take toward elementary- and secondary-school problems than that represented by Professor John M. Coulter's admirable paper read before the recent meeting of the Northern Illinois Teachers' Association.

That university and college men should legislate upon the matter of college-entrance requirements without co-operation of secondary-school men is, I think, indefensible. That secondary-school men should be intrusted with the authority to determine entrance requirements for the colleges is equally indefensible. What is needed is just what is indicated in the word “co-operation”; just what is represented by this and by other conferences between universities and secondary schools. We must approach the problem of entrance-requirements each with a firm determination to recognize what is valuable in the prejudices of the other.

For I do not believe that prejudices can or should be entirely read out of our deliberations. Prejudices are generally the resultant attitudes which come out of the continued operation of ideals. The university man is dominated primarily by the ideals of science. The aim of his life is to search for truth, and he deifies truth for its own sake. Truth is, for him, an ultimate standard, a pure value. Now, the continued operation of this ideal, as I have suggested, gradually engenders a prejudice—gradually leads him to react emotionally and instantaneously against any proposal that is in the slightest way inconsistent with his ideal. In the secondary schools, on the other hand, the dominant ideal is coming very rapidly to be the

ideal of service. The high-school principal is measuring the value of his work by the service that he renders to the community. And this ideal also engenders in time a powerful prejudice, an instantaneous emotional reaction against anything that is inconsistent with the greatest service to the greatest number.

It is, I think, in the inevitable conflict between these two ideals that our present irritating problems concerning entrance requirements have their origin. Now what is needed is, to my mind, not a surrender of these ideals by either party to the controversy. Both types are needed, and, as Professor Coulter so clearly showed in the paper to which I have just referred, there is nothing inconsistent in the co-operation of both ideals. It is good for the man of science to hold truth as an ultimate value, for in the long run he will render much more efficient service under the operation of this ideal than he would render should he discard it. It is also good for the high-school man to look carefully into the needs of his community, and to determine as accurately as possible how to meet these needs, irrespective of their relation to the fulfilling of entrance requirements. Ideals, I repeat, must vary with the work that one does in life. If we all had precisely the same ideals and precisely the same standards of worth, this would be not only a very dreary and uninteresting life, but also a very ineffective life.

What is needed, then, is not a surrender of ideals by either party to the controversy; it is rather the adjustment of ideals. The right kind of college "domination" will provide a useful check upon the development of the high schools; and the proper degree of independence and initiative upon the part of the high schools will provide a useful check upon the demands of the colleges which might otherwise become inordinate and unfair. The ideal of the high school is service to the community; but this ideal, unchecked, is likely to become so narrow as to defeat in some measure its own purpose. The ideal of the university is truth established by the rigorous methods of science; but, unchecked, this is likely to prescribe conditions which the adolescent pupil will find it difficult or impossible to fulfil, the essential

features of which could be fulfilled by the subject-matter and methods more in harmony with community needs. It is well for every man to be enthusiastic concerning the work that he does; but this very enthusiasm implies the value of a check and control that shall hold the expression of his enthusiasm within healthful limits.

I am particularly anxious to emphasize this point, for I am convinced that university and high-school men very frequently misunderstand one another because of this conflict of ideals. I know university men who labor under the impression that their colleagues in the lower schools are dominated by unworthy motives when they request that certain subjects be granted entrance credits. They insist that these high-school men have in mind only the growth of their schools in numbers, and the consequent glory that will accrue to themselves if they build up a large enrolment. This inference, it is needless to say, is purely gratuitous. The high-school man may be, and in most cases he is, I am confident, thoroughly sincere. He has his own problem to meet—a problem which is bigger and broader than merely meeting entrance requirements; and he must strive to solve that problem. On the other hand, I know high-school men who look upon their university colleagues as persons who hold in contempt the judgment of men in the lower schools concerning educational values, and who either cannot or will not see the industrial and commercial and social life of the community as playing any part whatsoever in determining such values. This, again, is an unjust assumption; for the university man is also sincere in his attitude and, although there are men in the universities who have an air of intolerance toward the workers in the lower schools, whom they should in all conscience look upon as colleagues and not as subordinates, these men are not, as I have attempted to point out, either numerous or influential.

I have spoken of this phase of so-called college domination because it is the type that most people have in mind, I believe, when they use the term; and what I wish to point out is simply that, in this sense of the term, college domination is, in the

Middle West, largely imaginary. There is a sense, however, in which college domination is far from imaginary, and since both forms have some relation to the matter of motivation which it is my especial province to touch I shall refer briefly to this latter type.

The disastrous type of college domination of secondary schools is represented by the lack of professional standards in the training of secondary-school teachers. By professional standards I mean unique standards and criteria relating primarily to secondary education as distinguished from higher education. In this respect, the preparation of high-school teachers is far behind the preparation of elementary teachers, for the latter, in their normal-school courses, have their attention directed to the specific and unique problems of elementary education, and are adjusted to the elementary-school situation through the medium of practice-teaching with its close supervision and the serious import which always attaches to it in the normal-school course. The teacher going into the high school has in the university been trained in the subject-matter that he is expected to teach, but his professional education is commonly *nil*, and in only a few universities today is this training made effective through actual adjustment in the practice-school. The situation is precisely similar to that which would confront elementary education should it recruit its teachers exclusively from high-school graduates, and demand from them no specific professional training.

Now I believe that most of the evils that are associated in the popular mind with college domination have their root in this condition. A few days ago I received a long and interesting letter from a man who is dissatisfied with the high-school conditions and who is inclined to believe that college domination is responsible for the evils that he condemns. He had seen this topic in our program and accordingly gave me his views. His chief point of criticism is that the work of the high school is measured by standards that are adapted to the more mature university student, but quite unadapted to the high-school adolescent. To cite one statement from his letter:

The course of English literature which the Senior pupils of our high school are subjected to is practically identical with the course which I had in the University of Michigan, and which *no college student was allowed to be admitted to until he was a Junior.*

My correspondent may be in error in this and in other criticisms that he makes, but I am inclined to believe that there is a large measure of justification in his strictures. They would not, of course, hold for all high schools, but that they hold for a great many in which the classroom teachers are fresh from university courses there can be little reasonable doubt. It is generally admitted by high-school men that the customary courses in secondary-school science, for example, are ill-adapted to the average high-school pupil, and largely because they have borrowed too liberally from the content and method of university courses. Both secondary science and secondary literature have functions that are different from the functions of the cognate subjects in the university and yet there is now very little differentiation as to either matter or method.

Now I maintain that this is due largely to the indirect domination to which I have referred—to the lack among the high-school teachers themselves of definite and unique standards of the type of content, the type of approach, and the type of method which best meet the needs of the high-school pupils. And this condition will continue so long as the universities fail to provide professional courses similar to those provided in the normal school for elementary teachers.

Those of us who represent in the universities the needs and ideals of the lower schools—those of us, in other words, who are connected with the educational departments of the universities—are constantly facing the problem of providing the candidates for high-school teaching with an effective complement of professional ideals. I have sometimes been told by my colleagues, and in all seriousness, that candidates for secondary teacherships could much more profitably spend all their available time in mastering the subject-matter than spend a fraction of it in professional study. And yet an investigation that I made last year among the principals and superintendents who

employ our graduates shows that in no single instance did a graduate fail because of lack of subject-matter, and that in every case of failure which I could find the failure was due to lack of qualities which might have been provided by the proper sort of professional training or the inherent lack of which would certainly have been revealed by a course in practice-teaching.

I maintain that what my correspondent attributes to college domination *is* due to college domination in the last analysis, but that it is not due to the kind of domination which he has in mind. It is the indirect but much more insidious and dangerous domination of college methods and college standards carried down into the high school by college graduates because these are the only methods and the only standards that are fresh enough in their minds to be applied. This is a vastly different kind of domination from that which is meant by most people when they use the term, who have in mind the university man with the big stick of entrance-requirements, clubbing the high schools into an arbitrary line. The high-school visitors of the universities of the Middle West are, so far as I know, essentially public-school men. Those with whom I have talked deplore the conditions that I have described just as thoroughly as my correspondent deplores such conditions. They believe that the high schools should have their own distinctive ideals and adhere to them.

And now I have only the briefest time in which to discuss the relation between college-entrance requirements and college denomination on the one hand and the problem of motivation on the other.

First of all, I must state what I mean by motivation and what I think to be the significance of this concept in educational theory. In essence, a motive is the idea of an end, more or less remote, that is to be attained through a series of efforts. There is nothing markedly different between what we are today calling proper motivation and what the older writers upon school management discussed under the head of "incentives." Indeed, White's classification of incentives as natural or artificial might well serve as the text for a present-day sermon upon proper

motivation of school work. We are, however, approaching the subject from a slightly different angle, and in the light of broader principles.

It has been urged that the motives that dominate the pupil in the mastery of knowledge or in the acquisition of habit determine the efficiency of that knowledge or habit in serving as an instrument in the solution of later problems. This is, the possibility of connecting knowledge or habit with the real problems of later life will be the greater, the more closely the initial mastery of knowledge or habit has been related to similar vital problems. It is generally agreed, for example, that a pupil who learns to spell or to compose or to compute because he appreciates the significance of spelling or composition or computation in solving real life-problems will find a much more extended application for these arts than one who has mastered them arbitrarily.

While I believe that there is much to be commended in this argument, its force is somewhat weakened by certain well-known facts. Experience clearly shows that some facts and some habits acquired without particular reference to what we term real life-problems are still available for later use. Indeed, nature itself, through the instincts of curiosity, play, and repetition, has provided for the acquisition of useful information and useful habits at a time when the child has not the slightest conception of their true function. Watch a little two-year-old catch a word that he hears, and repeat it over and over again for the mere delight that the repetition affords. He is undergoing a drill process which has, to his consciousness, no significance aside from the fact that it satisfies an immediate and instinctive desire. And yet the adjustments that he is mastering and reducing to automatic control are very obviously of prime importance in later situations.

I confess that I have found no little difficulty in harmonizing these instinctive tendencies with that doctrine of motivation which insists that habits and knowledge gained outside the matrix of real life-problems will not function later with reference to such problems. Nature, with its adaptive instincts of play,

curiosity, and imitative repetition, seems to have decreed otherwise, and to have executed this decree with marked efficiency.

My own solution of this problem may not appeal to you as convincing, but I shall give it to you for what it is worth. I believe that as many of the essential habits as possible should be fixed through the operation of the native instincts, without going out of our way to search for more involved motives. It is much simpler, and I believe no less effective, to have many of the simpler number and language habits mastered in this way, than it is to lead the child through a complicated process of reasoning to see the utility of these habits in solving what we call real problems. And similarly I believe that wherever native curiosity will serve to fix facts or form an approach to principles of explanation it is wise economy to lay hold of this curiosity and work it for all that it is worth.

There comes a time, however, when native interest flags. The more complicated habit-groups can seldom be adequately mastered in this way. The delight in repetition comes to an end before automatic control has been acquired. It is then that the real worth of the habit should be utilized if possible to motivate its mastery. It is then that the pupil should be led to see that undergoing the discipline of repetition results in a mastery that is unequivocally of service to him. If we can insure this recognition of the "worthwhileness" of the discipline, we are doing something more than making our drill-process effective and economical as such. We are teaching the pupil the most important of all lessons. "Genius," says George Eliot, "is little more than a great capacity for receiving discipline"; and we may supplement this by saying that discipline is doing things that we do not wish to do for the sake of attaining an end that is worth while. We cannot make all of our pupils into geniuses, but we can increase our pupils' capacity for discipline. If through showing them over and over again the "worthwhileness" of sustained effort we can get them to subject themselves more willingly to disciplinary processes, we shall do much toward increasing the sum-total of human achievement.

The older education was often blind to this possibility. It required repetition far beyond the point where repetition is an instinctive delight. But it did not always recognize the importance of convincing the pupil that this repetition really issued in increased power, really contributed to his ability to solve problems. It is because the modern doctrine of motivation impels the teacher to search for ends or motives the realization of which will in the end justify an arduous process of discipline that it appeals to me. Interpreted in this way it is the very opposite of the sugar-coating process against which all of us have a most justifiable prejudice. To lead the child to think the things in life that are most worth doing are easy to do is to teach him a lie—a lie which many unfortunate children have had to unlearn through the bitter experience of later years. But the doctrine of motivation does not mean sugar-coating. It does not mean giving the pupil the impression that good things come without effort. It rather sanctions effort by bringing the effort into an intimate relation with the results. Properly applied, it will lead the pupil to look upon his own little achievements as types of all achievement—will lead him to see that Peary conquering the Pole, or Wilbur Wright constructing the aeroplane, or Morse struggling through long years of poverty and suffering to perfect the telegraph, underwent experiences that differ only in degree and not in kind from the experiences of the school. This is the only way to make school and life synonymous in the true sense, for the essential worth of human life is struggle and self-sacrifice and the subordination of immediate desire to ultimate purpose.

There is little doubt in my own mind that the very fact that the high school prepares for college gives to many pupils an increased respect for the work of the school, a respect which in itself adds to the conviction that its mastery is worth while. But this motive should be purely supplementary and not fundamental. The great defect of much of our present-day teaching in the secondary school lies in the fact that the entrance requirements are looked upon by the teachers in an arbitrary way. That is, the teaching aims

only at such mastery as shall fulfil formal entrance requirements, and consequently misses many of the rich values which these studies might realize. The spur of entrance requirements should be an accessory motive both to the pupil and to the teacher. And when the pupil reaches college he should find, as I fear he does not always find today, that the work he has done really prepares him for college work—that there is a real articulation. Sometimes I think that college students come to believe that much of their high-school work has not helped them to a mastery of the college situation—that many of the courses which they take in college could be completed without the preliminary high-school training. The effect of such a conclusion is obviously to defeat the growth of the prejudices in favor of work and effort. This is a sort of gold-brick game that education has played too many times, and it suggests again the crying need for a penetrating study of educational values; especially in this day of the wide extension in the elective system and the growing tendency to abandon the notion that the best type of education must be articulated from start to finish. We have a serious problem here, and one that is likely to cause education no end of trouble in the near future.

I feel that so rambling a discussion as I have indulged in demands whatever justification a summary may furnish. I attempted in the first place to make clear my conception of the term "college domination." I maintained that this domination may be of two types: first, the explicit dictation of high-school policies by college authorities; and secondly, the indirect control of the high-school situation by the college through the teachers which it furnishes. I maintained that the first type of domination is not now a serious menace in the Middle West because of the disposition of college and high-school men to get together in conferences and work out the problems, each recognizing the ideals of the other. I maintained that some measure of value attaches to the wise prescription of college-entrance requirements in that it furnishes a check or control upon the local demands which may be made upon the high school, and which should of course be the primary consideration in constructing the curric-

ulum. I maintained that the second type of college domination is a serious menace to secondary-school education and that this domination will continue so long as the factor of professional training is neglected in the preparation of secondary-school teachers. I maintained that motivation, from the point of view of increasing the instrumental value of habits and knowledge, is important, but that it also has its limitations, and that the field for motivation lies in the mastery of complicated habits and involved types of knowledge where the instincts of repetition and curiosity no longer operate effectively. I maintained that proper motivation in these phases of education will help not only in the specific mastery of habits and knowledge but also in engendering in the pupils effective ideals of effort and persistence by demonstrating to them the essential worth of these virtues. I maintained finally that entrance requirements may profitably function as motives, but that they should be subsidiary and not primary motives, and that the aim of both teacher and pupil in the high school should be primarily to realize the intrinsic values which the subject-matter possesses.